

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 220138

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EAIR, CU, AO, CA

SUBJECT: AIR CANADA DC-8S LEASED TO CUBA

1. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS HAVE SERVED TO UNDERSCORE OUR CONCERN THAT THE TWO AIR CANADA DC-8S CURRENTLY UNDER LEASE TO CUBANA AIRLINES MAY BE USED DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY TO SUPPORT CUBAN MILITARY ADVENTURISM IN AFRICA. WE BELIEVE IT IS IMPORTANT TO EMPHASIZE OUR CONCERNS ON THIS MATTER TO THE GOC. ACCORDINGLY, THE EMBASSY IS REQUESTED TO MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS ORALLY AT THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE LEVEL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (WE WOULD THINK UNDER SECRETARY BASIL ROBINSON APPROPRIATE).

2. THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE TWO AIR CANADA DC-8 AIRCRAFT CURRENTLY ON LEASE TO CUBANA AIRLINES MAY BE USED IN SUPPORT OF CUBAN MILITARY ADVENTURISM IN AFRICA IS A MATTER OF SERIOUS AND CONTINUING CONCERN TO THE USG. THIS

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IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IN VIEW OF THE CONTINUED PRESENCE OF

THE CUBAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE IN ANGOLA, ITS ROLE IN ANGOLA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS, AND THE THREAT OF CUBAN INTERVENTION ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA. SEVERAL DEVELOPMENTS HAVE SERVED TO HEIGHTEN THIS CONCERN.

A. THE MINISTRY WILL RECALL OUR INITIAL UNDERSTANDING THAT AIR CANADA INTENDED TO LEASE CUBANA A SINGLE AIRCRAFT FOR USE ON ITS NEWLY ESTABLISHED HAVANA/MON REAL RUN. WHEN IT BECAME CLEAR THAT THE LEASE AGREEMENT IN FACT INVOLVED TWO AIRCRAFT, AND THAT THEY WOULD BE USED ON CUBANA ROUTES TO OTHER POINTS IN LATIN AMERICA AND TO AFRICA, THE POSSIBILITY WAS SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED THAT THE DC-8S WOULD IN EFFECT RELEASE OTHER TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT FOR USE IN SUPPORT OF MILITARY OPERATIONS. THUS, THE DC-8S MAY BE INDIRECTLY SUPPORTING THE CUBAN MILITARY EFFORT IN AFRICA, DESPITE THE CANADIAN IMPOSED PROHIBITION ON THEIR DIRECT MILITARY USE.

B. WE HAVE RECEIVED REPORTS RECENTLY THAT THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT HAS APPROACHED OR INTENDS TO APPROACH THE GOC IN AN EFFORT TO REMOVE FROM THE LEASE AGREEMENT THE EXISTING PROHIBITION ON USE OF THE AIRCRAFT FOR NON-CIVILIAN PURPOSES.

C. WE ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT THE CUBANS ARE CONSIDERING APPROACHING THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE LEASE OF ADDITIONAL DC-8 AIRCRAFT.

3. A. SIX MONTHS HAVE NOW PASSED SINCE THE DELIVERY OF THE AIRCRAFT TO CUBA AND THEREFORE THIS IS AN APPROPRIATE TIME TO ACCESS THEIR IMPACT ON CUBA'S OVERALL AIRLIFT CAPABILITY. ACCORDINGLY, WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY INFORMATION THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT CAN PROVIDE ON THE WAY IN WHICH THESE AIRCRAFT HAVE BEEN UTILIZED TO DATE. IT IS OUR UNDERSTANDING THAT UNDER THE TERMS OF THE LEASE AGREEMENT, THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT HAS MADE SUCH INFORMATION AVAILABLE TO THE GOC.

B. WE ARE AWARE THAT AT THE TIME THE LEASE AGREEMENT WAS NEGOTIATED, THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATED ITS OWN
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CONCERN ABOUT THE POSSIBLE DIRECT MILITARY USE OF THESE AIRCRAFT BY INSISTING UPON THE INCLUSION OF A PROVISION PROHIBITING THEIR USE FOR OTHER THAN CIVILIAN PURPOSES. THIS UNDERSTANDING WAS ALSO EMBODIED IN A CANADIAN DIPLOMATIC NOTE TO CUBA. WHILE WE CANNOT EVALUATE REPORTS THAT THE CUBANS INTEND TO SEEK REMOVAL OF THIS PROHIBITION WE STRONGLY URGE THAT SHOULD SUCH AN APPROCCH BE MADE, THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT INSIST ON THE RETENTION OF THE EXIST-

ING LIMITATIONS. RELAXATION OF THE PROHIBITION ON MILITARY USE OF THESE AIRCRAFT WOULD BE VERY DISTURBING, AND COULD BE A SOURCE OF EMBARRASSMENT IN U.S./CANADIAN RELATIONS.

C. WITH REFERENCE TO THE REPORT THAT THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT MAY SEEK ADDITIONAL U.S.-BUILT AIRCRAFT, WE WOULD LIKE TO

STATE OUR STRONG EXPECTATION THAT SHOULD SUCH A REQUEST BE FORTHCOMING, THE MATTER WOULD BE DISCUSSED WITH THE USG PRIOR TO CANADIAN GOVERNMENT APPROVAL OF ANY FURTHER LEASES. ROBINSON

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